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ABSTRACT

Issues facing California's community colleges are reviewed in this response to the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) report, "Missions and Functions of the California Community Colleges." The paper first asserts that the most critical question facing the community colleges in the 1980's is whether they should and can continue to expand access to postsecondary education if these gains in educational equality can come only at the sacrifice of educational quality. In consideration of this question, the needs of nontraditional, underprepared students are discussed, and the factors and difficulties involved in meeting their needs are explored. Next, the CPEC's conclusions regarding three specific college missions are reviewed and critiqued. While disagreeing with the CPEC's view of the causes of the declining number of college transfer students, the paper acknowledges the legitimacy of questioning whether community college transfer programs will be maintained, whether transfer students are sufficiently prepared for university-level work, and whether course and program articulation is adequate. With respect to the community colleges' vocational education role, the paper touches on program diversity, involvement in federal and state job training programs, and the public's satisfaction with the colleges' efforts. Next, the paper notes the quality and social impact of community college adult continuing education. The paper concludes with general observations on the community colleges' comprehensive mission. (AYC)

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California Postsecondary Education Commission
Meeting, July 20, 1981

Presentation
by

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I first wish to express my appreciation to the Commission and to Director Callan for inviting me to appear in what I assume will be the first in a sustained series of discussions regarding the missions and functions of the California Community Colleges. As stated in the introduction, the intent of the CPEC staff paper is to stimulate widespread discussion of directions and priorities for the community colleges in the 1980's. The directions and priorities for California's community colleges have been a matter of vigorous debate *within* the community college community since I've known it, and I welcome the opportunity to engage in these discussions with a wider audience, including this Commission. It seems that any time public fiscal resources are diminished, public services such as education are more publicly debated. This is inevitable and as it should be.

Discussion in the CPEC paper centers around six "major issues." Perhaps questions about the missions and functions of California Community Colleges can better be addressed by first focusing on two major themes: access and quality.

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The central issue is whether the California Community Colleges should continue to expand access, that is, equality of opportunity for postsecondary education. If they should (and there are good reasons why they should), will they be able to do so? And if they are able to do so, will such gains in *equality* come only at the sacrifice of *quality*?

Twenty years ago, community colleges enrolled one of every twenty-six California adults. Today they enroll one in every twelve California adults. This is an unparalleled effort at providing equal opportunity for postsecondary education.

Projections for the next half-decade suggest that California state and local tax revenues will be sufficient to cover cost-of-living increases for the community colleges, but probably not sufficient to cover both cost-of-living increases and enrollment increases resulting from expanded access. Consequently, to achieve the objective of expanding access, community colleges will need to become more efficient at carrying out certain of their educational activities. This notion becomes particularly critical as access is expanded since the "new" clientele typically will be older, possess fewer academic skills as a result of having less formal education than "traditional" students, and, therefore, will be more expensive to educate. To maintain quality, such "new" students require greater efforts on the part of colleges at pre-course skills assessment and advisement and need to be taught in smaller classes (all more-expensive-than-usual activities).

In the Commission paper's discussion on the question of re-thinking open enrollment, it is very correctly noted that the issue is not "if" community colleges will adapt their course requirements and methods to best suit the skill levels of students, but "to what degree" they will do this.

Community colleges do use several tools to improve the skill levels of their students, including pre-course advisement, career counseling, and screening. These tools should continue to be used and improved to help make community colleges more effective learning institutions. Use of these devices allows colleges to take a very diverse student body and create learning situations with more homogeneous learners.

More important and likely more difficult to implement, however, is the needed reallocation of college resources such that the skills of faculty and class sizes both are appropriate to the needs of students. This is especially true in the basic skills area where small group (expensive) instruction is necessary. One time-tested method to accomplish this reallocation is to increase the size of certain classes, perhaps using television and other "mediated" methods where possible, and use the savings to maintain small classes where necessary. Matching faculty skills and student needs is more difficult in the face of tenure, limits on the use of part-timers, declining enrollments (in some colleges), and changing student subject-area preferences.

Adding to the future difficulties of maintaining program quality will be the increasing need to maintain and improve both staff and facilities. Both types of resources will be aging and, in some cases, become obsolete during the 1980's.

Economies in community college operations will need to be intelligently studied and selectively implemented. Otherwise, *increases* in access that emphasize continuing-lifelong learning may well result in *decreased* quality elsewhere in the colleges, thereby causing the "traditional" missions of offering transfer programs, occupational education, and general education to "suffer," i.e., the specter raised in the Commission paper.

It is this issue, then -- *Access versus quality* -- that will represent for the community colleges, and for that matter, all of higher education, the greatest challenge in the 1980's.

Some specific community college missions addressed by the staff's paper:

1. Transfer

The clear inference in the discussion paper is that the quality of the more traditional functions of community colleges, including transfer education now are being ended by the increasing emphasis on continuing education. As evidence for that inference, the author cites the declining number of community college students transferring to the University of California (UC) in the last half-decade. I am not convinced that the evidence supports the inference, i.e., that the decline in the number of UC transfer students is caused by a

shift of attention on the part of the colleges to the continuing education function. Rather, let me explore with you an alternative hypothesis.

Inferences about the "vitality" of community college transfer programs based on numbers transferring to UC are incomplete and misleading. Only one of every ten community college transfers enroll at UC. Six in ten community college transfers go to the State University and College system (CSUC), and the remaining three of ten enroll either in private four-year institutions in California or in four-year institutions out of California. This pattern has been relatively constant during the past half-decade. Numbers of transfers and the "vitality" of transfer programs need to be analyzed in this broader context, not just in the narrow university context.

The decline in numbers of community college transfers to UC and CSUC occurred only between 1975 and 1979. Prior to that time, the number of students transferring each year had increased from 48,700 in 1969-70 to 60,700 in 1975-76.

The decline of the past half-decade in transfers may have stopped in 1980-81 when, based on preliminary estimates by UC and CSUC about 52,500 students transferred from community colleges to UC and CSUC -- up 1,600 from the level (51,900) of the prior year. It is not clear whether this change in trend is temporary or will continue.

The decline in transfers of the past half-decade appears to have been directly related to the decline in full-time enrollment.

Several factors contributed to this decline: 1) the gradual decrease in high school enrollments following 1974, 2) the marked improvement in California's economy during the last half of the 1970's, 3) an increasing preference for job oriented education on the part of lower division students, 4) the change in eligibility for veterans' benefits in 1976, and 5) increased recruitment of first-time freshmen by the four-year institutions.

It is, in my view, more logical to assume that these powerful demographic forces have had more to do with the decline of the numbers of transfer students than the growth of continuing education enrollments.

It is extremely difficult to project what will happen to the number of transfer students in the 1980's. There appear to be several contradictory trends. First, the number of community college students who are potential "transfers" is likely to decline due to a projected decline in the number of younger adults enrolling, particularly after 1982. However, increasing inflation, growing costs of alternative postsecondary institutions, and the prospects for shrinking financial aid may counter the decline in the high school cohort. In addition, community college enrollments have historically been impacted by the state of the economy. As the economy declines, community college enrollments tend to increase, and vice-versa. In addition, student preferences *must* be taken into account. A shift

in student preferences away from job-oriented education and toward general education, which historically has been the pattern when the availability of new jobs has declined, could increase numbers of students interested in transferring. The California Employment Development Department is projecting that just such a decline in new jobs will occur in the 1980's.

In any event, whatever the cause of increases or decreases in numbers of community college transfer students, the paper raises a legitimate and important question: Will certain colleges maintain their commitment to transfer programs if small numbers of students are involved? It is clear that if *access* is an important objective -- and the Board of Governors believes it is -- and if community colleges are to maintain their identity as comprehensive colleges, then each college or district (in the case of a multi-college district) *must* maintain a viable transfer program. Again, *access* is the key.

The notion of simply trying to maintain or increase *numbers* of transfer students is faulty; particularly so in the face of a declining 18-24 year-old age cohort, significant numbers of under or unemployed baccalaureate degree-holders predicted for the early 1980's, and changing preferences on the part of students.

A second question regarding transfer concerns the "readiness" of transfer students in terms of basic skills and preparation for major now and in the future if UC and CSUC raise their expectations (particularly with respect to general education).

We are not convinced that data presented in the recent UC Retention and Transfer Study demonstrates conclusively that community college transfers to UC are not doing as well as they did in the past. As for community college transfers to CSUC, the CPEC paper itself states that "good information about performance after transfer is not yet available statewide..."

We need to have better information on this subject. What we *can* infer from the many studies on this topic is that

- (a) students' GPA's fall immediately after transfer, then increase to about the same level as "native" students by the end of undergraduate work, and that
- (b) transfer students take longer to complete upper division work than do native students.

The latter point (more time for transfer students) deals with the third question raised in the CPEC transfer discussion: articulation of courses and programs, including general education.

The longer length of time required by transfer students to complete their undergraduate work is due in part to not being prepared for their major. This problem, in turn, can be attributed largely to inadequate articulation between the California Community Colleges and the four-year institutions.

What is important is to assure that, as best we can, we work to identify, retain, and prepare students for transferring to other segments of higher education and to improve articulation with high schools and the other segments. The recently formed "Roundtable for Educational Opportunity" is devoting a major portion of its effort to that end. David Saxon and I recently issued a joint statement reconfirming our commitment to the transfer function. Glen Dumke and I are working on a similar statement. More importantly leaders from individual community college districts and UC and CSUC campuses are meeting more frequently and working together more cooperatively than ever before. The academic senates of all three segments are also communicating and cooperating at an unprecedented rate. Additionally, our office is engaged in a series of serious efforts to better identify potential transfer students; first, we are in the process of surveying all 107 community colleges to determine precisely how the colleges identify and assist potential transfer students; with the cooperation of UC, CSUC and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities we are expanding this survey to determine what efforts to aid potential community college transfers are currently underway in the four-year institutions; and finally, based on those findings, I plan to ask the Roundtable to actively support exemplary activities in this area.

In sum, California Community Colleges take their mission as the primary provider of lower division undergraduate education in this state very seriously and are taking positive steps to improve the quality of that service.

2. Occupational Education

It is ironic that in the Commission paper a decline in the number of transfer students is cited as an indication of problems concerning the transfer function but that dramatic *increases* in vocational education enrollments are *not* viewed as indications of that program's success.

Community colleges provision of occupational education is a strong and growing role which was first formally acknowledged in the Master Plan for Higher Education, which assigned to the community colleges the provision of instruction in "vocational-technical fields leading to employment." The direct result of that charge is that now two-thirds of community college enrollment is in occupational courses. The colleges provide programs and have become the preeminent source for skill training in various fields ranging from laser technology (Pasadena, Sierra, San Jose) through marine mechanics (Long Beach, Shasta) to electronic microscopy (San Joaquin Delta, East Los Angeles).

Consistent with this responsibility, the community colleges have extensive experience in federal and state job training programs going back to the MDTA (Manpower Defense Training Act) and more recently with CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) and CWETA (California Worksite Education and Training Act). More needs to be

said about the latter two programs. According to a study just completed by our staff, community colleges participated in CETA-funded programs in 1980-81 to the tune of \$27,000,000 and are the primary training providers for most of the 43 programs that have been funded under CWETA.

CWETA, a state effort, is of particular interest in that a prerequisite for funding is exacting a commitment from the participating employer that the trained individual will be guaranteed placement -- and this is precisely what has taken place.

Governor Brown's administration now has a clearer idea of the training resources that are available in the community colleges, and his aides, along with the Department of Economic and Business Development, are working with us to develop ways of encouraging industry siting in California by emphasizing skills training that is available at community colleges.

I am heartened by all of this, and by the role that the colleges can play in community and statewide economic development, but the issue raised by more narrowly defined employment training may be moving us away from the historical broadly-based combination of vocational and general education. I am concerned about that. In a recent article Stephen Bailey noted that people born today can expect to live 700,000 hours, and will spend 200,000 sleeping, leaving 500,000 hours. Only 90,000 of those hours will involve remunerative work.

That leaves 410,000 hours of potential leisure time and, as Bailey puts it, we need broadly based education so that "later in life when you knock on yourself someone answers."

California's general public seems well satisfied with the vocational training provided by local community college districts. In fact, a recent Field poll concluded that of those interviewed who identified a need and an intention to obtain vocational education training, the community colleges were seen by two out of three as a good place to gain that training.

3. Continuing Education

Adult continuing education has historically been a function shared between the community colleges and high school adult programs, rarely without some controversy. In my view, both segments have performed this role well, with different communities selecting different delivery systems. I am convinced that these programs are worthwhile and that both segments should continue to be provided state support for this category of program. The rapidly growing complexity of California's society and the greater longevity of its citizens suggest that there will be an increasing demand in the future for continuing education. It very well may be that the fiscal resources of the state will no longer support the full array of course offerings now supported and that some courses may be more appropriately fee-supported, but the function is an important one and has an important positive social impact.

Finally, let me close with some general observations.

The CPEC paper seems to assume that community college managers are motivated primarily by a desire to increase enrollments while keeping tuition low, and that community colleges are unable to establish priorities among their clientele and programs. This view is at once cynical and overly simplistic. It might be more accurate to characterize the community college problem in establishing priorities as choosing *among* communities rather than among missions or functions. Each community views its community college differently.

Choices are made and priorities established either explicitly or implicitly by all of the colleges. In the past, the major motivating objective or priority has been to expand access or to open opportunities for postsecondary education in response to community needs. This objective is accomplished, in part, by keeping the cost of attendance low. Achievement of this objective obviously results in higher enrollment, other things being equal. The diversity of communities across California leads to wide diversity of clientele and programs among the colleges.

This situation leads some observers to the view that California Community Colleges lack a "common mission." This is not the case. The comprehensive community-based mission is common to all colleges, it's just that implementing this mission in a wide variety of communities leads to great diversity in clientele, programs, and educational approaches. This diversity, including flexible and timely response to community educational needs, is one of the major strengths of the California Community Colleges.

The community colleges face serious problems in the decade ahead. Need and demand for services will increase at a time when financial resources will probably diminish. The problem of choosing between *access* and *quality* will become increasingly visible and perplexing. But a major problem ignored by the report will be in determining not only *how* these problems will be addressed, but by *whom*. What is the appropriate match between the statewide interest and the local interest? Which decisions are more appropriately made at the state level and which at the local?

The Master Plan envisioned a system of higher education comprised of three segments. The University of California - international in its scope and influence; the state college system - focusing primarily on state needs; and the community colleges (then the junior colleges), with their locally elected governing boards, focused on the concept of community-centered education. The Master Plan has served the state well, and I think a part of its beauty revolved around a different scope of influence for each of the three segments. I would hope that the 1980's will provide us with the wisdom to establish a broader consensus on statewide goals while protecting the local diversity that has served us well. On behalf of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, let me assure this Commission that we are anxious to continue this dialogue with the Commission, the Legislature, the Governor, and anybody else. It is my strong belief that out of a full discussion and understanding of the community college role in California society will come an even stronger educational enterprise.